

Alkali-Squilchuck Watershed, WRIA 40

This focus sheet provides information on the availability of water for new uses in the Alkali-Squilchuck Watershed. This information provides a starting point for potential water users in determining the best strategies for securing water for a future project or proposal in this area.

Much of central Washington is arid, receiving less than 20 inches of rain annually. Most of this precipitation arrives during the winter months when overall water demands are the lowest. During the summer, snow pack is gone, there is little rain, and naturally low stream flows are dependent on groundwater inflow. This means that groundwater and surface water are least available when water demands are the highest.

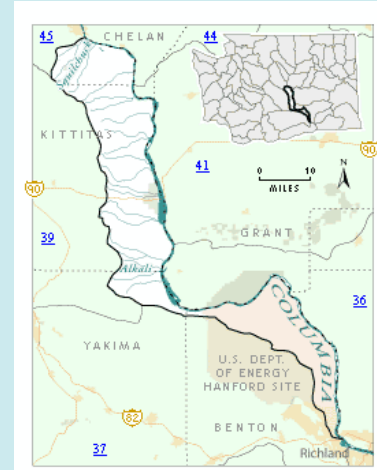
Factors affecting water availability

Much of the water in the Alkali-Squilchuck Watershed has already been spoken for. Increased demands from population growth, declining groundwater levels, and impacts from climate change are adding to the challenge of finding new water supplies in Water Resource Inventory Area 40, especially during the summer months.

In 2004, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation filed notice with the Department of Ecology that the United States intends to make examinations and surveys for the utilization of the unappropriated waters of the Columbia River and its tributaries above Priest Rapids Dam, pursuant to Section 90.40.030 of the Revised Code of Washington. The withdrawal of these waters from future appropriations is currently in effect until December 23, 2014.

Ecology cannot process any applications filed after December 28, 2004 for new rights to surface water or connected groundwater unless the applicant obtains a release from the Bureau of Reclamation or until the withdrawal has expired. The withdrawal may be extended, and Ecology expects BOR to request an extension before the withdrawal expires.

Federal lands, including the Hanford Reservation and the Yakima Firing Center, cover most of the basin. Federally Reserved Rights are not quantified at this time and thus the legal availability of water in these areas is undetermined.



Definitions

Adjudication: a legal process conducted through a superior court to determine the extent and validity of existing water rights.

Instream flows: flow levels adopted into rule that create a water right for the stream to protect fish, wildlife, stockwatering, recreational uses, and other instream uses and values.

WRIA: Water Resources Inventory Area; also known as a watershed or river basin. For environmental administration and planning purposes, Washington is divided up into 62 major watersheds, or WRIsAs.

Applications for surface water withdrawals from the mainstem Columbia River are subject to the Instream Resource Protection Program for the Columbia River, as are any proposed groundwater withdrawals determined to have a significant and direct impact on the Columbia River. (For more information, see <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=173-563>.)

Watershed planning has taken place at the northern end of WRIA 40 within the Squilchuck, Stemilt, and Malaga subbasins (formally known as WRIA 40A). Preliminary assessments by the local planning unit indicate that “most of the physically available water entering WRIA 40A is withdrawn or diverted for beneficial uses” and thus water is not available in these subbasins for new appropriations. For further information about this planning effort, see www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/wrias/Planning/40a.html.

Adjudication has also occurred in the Squilchuck and Stemilt subbasins. Prior adjudications in an area are further indication that most if not all of the available water has already been allocated.

Water supply available for new uses

Surface water and groundwater availability is currently very limited throughout the basin, especially in light of the Bureau of Reclamation’s withdrawal.

The WRIA 40A Watershed Plan developed by local stakeholders addresses water availability and water storage. See www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/wrias/Planning/40a.html.

The Office of Columbia River (OCR) is aggressively pursuing water supply development opportunities throughout the Columbia Basin, including the Lake Roosevelt Incremental Storage Release Project, which could benefit the basin. You may find further information on these efforts on the OCR Web Page at: www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html.

The groundwater permit exemption allows certain users of small quantities of ground water (most commonly, single residential well owners) to construct wells and develop their water supplies without obtaining a water right permit from Ecology. For more information about the groundwater permit exemption, refer to www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/fwr92104.pdf.

Additional options for finding a water supply, including more expedited processing of new or change applications include:

- Connecting to an established water supplier. This is the fastest and simplest option.
- Processing a change application through the Benton, Chelan, Kittitas, or Yakima county water conservancy board.
- Processing your application through the Cost Reimbursement Program. Mitigation for impacts to surface waters will likely be required. Refer to www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0511016.pdf.

For more information on these and other options, refer to “Alternatives for Water Right Application Processing” www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/1111067.pdf.

Pending water right applications in this watershed

Washington water law is based on the “prior appropriation” system, often called “first in time, first in right.” Applications for water from the same source must be processed in the order they are received.

Ecology asks anyone who needs a water right (new, change, or transfer) to submit the pre-application consultation form and meet with us to review your water supply needs and project proposal.

- Apply for a New Water Right
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/newrights.html>
- Apply to Change or Transfer a Water Right or Claim
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/change_transfer_use.html

The map in this document shows some of the factors that will be considered when evaluating water right permit applications. Here are some information sources to assist you with your research:

- Locate and research water rights on land parcels anywhere in the state (Water Resource Explorer)
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/info/webmap.html>
- Pending Water Right Applications by County
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/tracking-apps.html>
- Subscribe to a water right application RSS feed for a county or WRIA
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/wr_app_rss.html
- WRIA map showing the total number of water right claims, certificates, permits and applications
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/rights/Images/pdf/waterright-wria-maps.pdf>
- Search and view well reports using a variety of search tools
<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/waterresources/map/WCLSSWebMap/default.aspx>

For more information

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If you need this document in a version for the visually impaired, call the Water Resources Program at 360-407-6872. Persons with hearing loss can call 711 for Washington Relay Service. Persons with a speech disability can call 877-833-6341.

